



My name is Ferne McAllister and I am a member of Our Families Can't Wait, which is a growing organization of families committed to addressing the chronic underfunding of DDS services for our loved ones with intellectual disabilities.

We became involved with DDS some years ago for our adoptive son, and it was clear even then that the agency was struggling. Calls and e-mails not returned; misinformation, months and months of persistent requests to get authorization for already budgeted expenditures. These issues were the norm.

My son is now in an excellent therapeutic residential out of state program, a program so good it should be a baseline model for Connecticut. It is currently funded by DCF Voluntary Services. Neither DDS nor DCF will continue to fund that placement despite Nick's progress. We are now required to commit to one of two programs in CT, where the extensive programming is not available. Once DDS funding for residential educational programs ceases, his future is in limbo.

Nick longs now to have the typical lifestyle of young adults; his own place, continuing education, fulfilling work, friendships and dating. In home services would not be appropriate for us. Nick needs to evolve, and we need some semblance of privacy and peace within our home without constant intrusion by strangers assisting our children. We want him settled in an excellent living situation, residential or group home, where he is happy and feels at home, can have friends and family visit often, develop relationships, is trained for meaningful work, where he has the option of continuing to evolve, where there is well-trained, appropriate, morally and ethically competent staff to assist him.

As our children age, so do we, with the inherent decline in health, energy, financial resources, physical, and sometimes emotional capacity to continue providing care. I am tormented by the thoughts of what will happen to Nick when he ages out of school.

It is beyond shocking that DDS essentially has no ongoing planning at all for clients. A young person recently aged out of a high level of therapeutic residential care and was dumped into a motel. Not humane, never mind therapeutic. When a parent dies or becomes incapacitated, it is as if DDS is blindsided by this and doesn't know what to do with the adult child now without an advocate/caregiver/home. More and more children enter this frightening scenario. "Priority" lists – are essentially meaningless, because DDS currently runs in emergency mode, such as when a parent dies.

We desperately need good, solid group homes, residential centers, social and vocational centers for these Connecticut residents. We need plans in place, and fluid transitioning to whatever residence or program would be best for the individual. We need to provide a good quality of life.

I expect that you will familiarize yourself with current programs, or lack of programs, the quality of programs, the current housing situations for adults under DDS care, so that you can fund appropriate centers, group homes, residential housing and allow DDS to provide options for care rather than a one plan fits all. Ask questions. Pop into the few residential facilities and group homes and see what you think. Thus far, what I have seen for children with cognitive and/or mental health disabilities is shockingly poor; and even those are not available for individuals over the age of 21.

The last speech of Hubert H. Humphrey is one I think of often - "...the moral test of government is how that government treats those who are in the dawn of life, the children; those who are in the twilight of life, the elderly; those who are in the shadows of life; the sick, the needy and the handicapped". Clearly, the State of Connecticut has much work to do to pass that moral test. On behalf of Our Families Can't Wait, I urge the Appropriations Committee to add urgently needed funding for the DDS budget, especially for residential facilities, in-home supports, and increased respite services.

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